

# Dynamics of Writing

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Assessing academic abilities in the Indian educational system is closely linked with proficiency in writing. The English examination consists of essay type, nontext, and text-based exercises. Whatever the writing activity, all teachers of English in India moan about the learners' inability to communicate in writing.

Writing, an important part of language learning, is essentially a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic and to analyze and classify any background knowledge. Then, writers need suitable language to structure these ideas in the form of a coherent discourse. Our purpose, therefore, is to help our learners produce self-contained compositions. But for the learners to do so, they have to link and develop information, ideas, or arguments in logical sequences. Without writing practice, students have difficulty in achieving clarity, which is the goal of any writing exercise.

Too often we assume that after giving learners an initial stimulus to arouse interest in a given topic, we can simply leave them to complete the writing tasks. But even professional writers must make plans, use notes, reflect on issues, and make several rough drafts before completing their work. So, students who are still learning the process of thinking through writing require their teachers' help to structure and organize their ideas. What kind of help teachers provide and the manner in which they provide the help are the questions this article aims to answer.

## **Situation**

This article is a result of our classroom teaching experience. Our learners are students at the tertiary level between the ages of 17 and 20. The class has 70 students. All the learners have English as the medium of instruction. Although they are capable of logical thinking, they need to practice purposive and organized writing.

## **The Writing Task**

Since letter writing is a part of the course, learners are already familiar with the letter format. We have selected the following task: Write a letter to your elder brother, persuading him to buy a television set for the family. (We allotted at least one hour for this task.)

## **Objectives**

Because we want the learners to write individually and enjoy writing, we start with the following objectives:

1. To integrate writing with speaking, listening, and reading. (This broadens the writing task.)

2. To develop the strategy of persuasion and to reach a conclusion. Thus, writing is a tool for developing logical thinking.

### The Activity

Oral discussion, a “mind map,” and a reading text are the pedagogical prompts to make writing a holistic activity. We begin by asking the learners to discuss the topic, in this case the advantages and disadvantages of having a television set at home. During this discussion a friendly atmosphere is built. Based on this information, the groups make their recommendations. This oral activity encourages brainstorming and exposes the learners to some new ideas.

To ensure that the students have not left out facts, they are given a mind map and asked to predict what is in the text they will read. The facts and the mind map help students to come to certain conclusions. Learners are free to modify and expand their ideas based on the mind map, discussion, and text. This gives students the necessary input before they write.

### Operationalizing the Pedagogy

Step 1: In groups of five, the students are given 10 minutes to discuss and write down the advantages and disadvantages of the topic. Then, one group gives the advantages, with input from the other groups, and another group is asked to give the disadvantages, with others adding their ideas. Both lists are put on the blackboard in the form of phrases or sentences. For example, our list of advantages and disadvantages for television in the home was as follows:

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#### Advantages

TV Programmes provide recreation  
Inform about current events  
  
Fill up free time  
  
Provide access to new ideas/learning  
  
Educate  
  
Help to find jobs/career choices

#### Disadvantages

TV violence stimulates aggressive behavior  
Violence leads the viewers to perceive the real world as more dangerous than it might be.  
Selection of program may cause conflict in the family  
Watching TV becomes a habit and one loses the desire to create alternative forms of recreation  
Watching TV breaks down communication within the family and social life suffers  
Slang and catch words become active vocabulary

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This activity gives the learners confidence in their abilities to create ideas and a sense of participation in their learning process.

Step 2: The class is given a mind map to help them organize, expand, and clarify their ideas.

Step 3: Next, learners read a given text related to the theme of the task. We select texts that provide information for the writing tasks. After learners have read the text we give them reading comprehension exercises, like true or false, main idea, and vocabulary development.

Step 4: After students have identified some advantages and some disadvantages of the topic, we ask them to rearrange the main points so they can write two paragraphs. After five minutes, we circulate among the students to check their outlines.

Step 5: Students are given 30 minutes to complete their letters, after which they check their own work for mistakes. Then they exchange papers to allow peer correction. They underline the errors and put the correct form in pencil. This gives them practice in correcting mistakes. Finally, we collect all the written work for the final correction.

## Conclusion

The pedagogic construct that we have adopted for developing writing focuses on strategies of persuasion. This model consists of three phases. In the first phase the teacher's concern is mainly to encourage oral activity by brainstorming for ideas on a particular theme and to activate the learners creative thinking. In the second phase the teacher provides the learners with some framework to help them clarify and organize their ideas into logical sequences. The mind map and the reading task in the pedagogic operation are used in this phase. The third phase is subdivided into two stages. The teacher provides useful pedagogic prompts to help the learner with the organizational pattern of the writing task and the actual writing task. Here the teacher's job is restricted to correcting syntactic errors for accuracy and pointing out flaws in organizing ideas.

This pedagogic model has three distinct advantages for teachers. First, it makes their job of marking discourse simpler at the content level. Second, it allows students to make an easy transition from controlled and guided writing to free writing, which is precisely the term-end requirement in the examination. Finally, it encourages students to reason, which is essential for achieving coherence in written discourse.

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